

The End Of Books?

1894 / 2019



“Printing is threatened with death by the various devices for registering sound which have lately been invented, and which little by little will go on to perfection.”

Octave Uzanne, 1894

Introduction

The latest technological innovations in media are frequently purported to supplant books. More than a century before the appearance of e-readers and audiobooks, the fervent French bibliophile Octave Uzanne (1851–1931) wrote a short story predicting that sound technology would soon render printed text obsolete. This book recounts Uzanne’s story alongside modern speculation on the future of books.

On the left-hand pages of this book you’ll find Uzanne’s ‘The End of Books’ with illuminative illustrations by Albert Robida – both originally published in 1894.

On the right-hand pages of this book you’ll find an anonymised web discussion taken from the social news site Reddit – posted in 2019.

OctaveUzanne 125 years ago

The End of Books

It was in London, about two years ago, that the question of “the end of books” and their transformation into something quite different was agitated in a group of book-lovers, artists, men of science and of learning, on a memorable evening, never to be forgotten by anyone then present.

We had met that evening, which happened to be one of the scientific Fridays of the Royal Society, at a lecture given by Sir William Thomson, the eminent English physicist, professor in the University of Glasgow, universally known for the part he took in the laying of the first transatlantic cable.

On this Friday evening Sir William had announced to his brilliant audience of savants and men of the world that the end of the terrestrial globe and of the human race was mathematically certain to occur in precisely ten million years.

Taking his stand on the theory of Helmholtz, that the sun is a vast sphere in process of cooling, and, by the law of gravity, of shrinking

PaigeTurner 1 year ago

Anyone else afraid that books will be irrelevant in the future?

I really want to publish some novels in the future, after university most likely, but I’m afraid that by the time I get there technology will have evolved so rapidly that good old paperback or hardcover novels will be something of the past.

RusselSprout 20 points · 1 year ago

People have been saying this since the advent of e-readers, and novels are nowhere near dead. I mean, what kind of technologies do you foresee developing in the next decade that would render storytelling obsolete?

JustinCase 16 points ·

People have been saying it since the advent of radio.

Writing did not replace speech. The printing press did not replace writing. Radio did not replace print. Video did not replace audio.

in proportion as it cools, and having estimated the energy of the solar heat as four hundred and seventy-six million horse-power to the superficial square foot of its photo-sphere, Sir William had demonstrated that the radius of the photosphere grows about one-hundredth part shorter every two thousand years, and that it is therefore quite possible to fix the precise hour when its warmth will be insufficient to maintain life on our planet.

The great philosopher had surprised us no less by his treatment of the antiquity of the earth, which he showed to be a question of pure mechanics. In the face of geologists and naturalists he gave it a past history of not more than a score of millions of years, and showed that life had awakened upon earth in the very hour of the sun's birth – whatever may have been the origin of this fecundating star, whether the bursting of a pre-existing world or the concentration of nebulae formerly diffused.

We had left the Royal Institute deeply moved by the great problems which the learned Glasgow professor had taken such pains to resolve scientifically for the benefit of his audience. With minds in pain, almost crushed

Screens will not replace printed books.

Each of those technologies have inherent and unduplicable advantages which have not been eliminated by the subsequent innovations. History and the future is a long time, and I may be proven wrong some day, but I'm not particularly worried about the extinction of the novel in the next few decades.

IsadoreBell 2 points · 1 year ago

Books survive power outages and dead batteries just fine.

MannyKinn Script reader 10 points · 1 year ago

I mean, what kind of technologies do you foresee developing in the next decade that would render storytelling obsolete?

VR porn.

“Stories”? No thanks grandpa, I'm off inserting my metaphor in that octo-titted space mermaid's plot hole- if you know what I mean.

by the immensity of the figures with which he had been juggling, we were silently walking home, a group of eight different personalities – philologists, historians, journalists, statisticians, and merely interested men of the world – walking two and two, like creatures half awake, down Albemarle Street and Piccadilly.

Edward Lembroke dragged us all into the Junior Athenæum to supper; and the champagne had no sooner limbered our half-numbed brains than it was who should speak first about Sir William Thomson's lecture and the future destiny of humanity – questions interesting above all others and usually as varied as the minds of those who discuss them.

James Whittemore discoursed at length upon the intellectual and moral predominance which by the end of the next century the younger continents would have over the older ones. He gave us to understand that the Old World would little by little give up its claim to omnipotence, and America would lead the van in the march of progress. Oceanica, born only yesterday, would develop superbly, throwing off the mask of its ambitions and taking a prominent place in the universal concert of

Chris.P.Bacon 10 points · 1 year ago

It'd still use a script.

SueFlay Published Author 12 points · 1 year ago

Vinyl is still not dead. Vinyl. Don't panic :)

[deleted] 2 points · 1 year ago

And if anything, vinyl is getting more popular recently.

EileenWright 1 point · 1 year ago

Yes, and let's hope it continues, if nothing else than for its own sake.

Just a fwiw here : the great Neil Young and Jack White (among others) are doing everything they are in seeing-to Vinyl receives its fair and proper due.

[deleted] 2 points · 1 year ago

I'm not going to pretend I understand the vinyl thing. Never really listened to it.

EileenWright 1 point · 1 year ago

I'll not blither about the melancholic callings therein for whtvr "demographics"

the nations. Africa, he added, that continent ever explored and ever mysterious, where at a moment's warning countries of thousands of square miles are discovered – Africa so painfully won to civilization, does not seem called to play an eminent part, notwithstanding her immense reservoir of men. She will be the granary of other continents; upon her soil various invading peoples will by turns play dramas of small importance; hordes of men will meet and clash and fight and die there in greedy desire to possess this still virgin soil, but civilization and progress will gain a footing only after thousands of years, when the prosperity of the United States, having reached its zenith, will be drawing toward its decline, and when new and fateful evolutions shall have assigned a new habitat to the new products of human genius.

Julius Pollock, gentle vegetarian and learned naturalist, usually a silent boon companion, amused himself by imagining the effect upon human customs of the success of certain interesting chemical experiments transforming the conditions of our social life. Nutriment will then be accurately portioned out in the form of powders, syrups, pellets, and biscuits,

which applies, but I would like to pitch that vinyl does have a texture translational thing, v. the mere thru-the-airwaves-and-electrons bereft of saidsame.

:)

[deleted] 5 points · 1 year ago

You're asking if paper will be irrelevant, not books.

Maybe physical books will die, but people will still read on e-readers and such.

DwaynePipe 13 points · 1 year ago

An e-book is still a book. Even if paper books become entirely obsolete, people will still buy and read fiction.

LouPole 3 points · 1 year ago

There is this bookstore in my town that has classic and popular series really cheap. It's a toss-up of what you'll find, but that just makes it more exciting. They also will let you publish your own books there and if it sells well will continue to help out. It has five stars and it

everything reduced to the smallest possible bulk. No more bakers, butchers, or wine-merchants then; no more restaurants or grocers; only a few druggists, and everyone thenceforth free, happy, all wants provided for at the cost of a few cents; hunger blotted out from the roll of human woes. Especially the world would cease to be the unclean slaughter-house of peaceful creatures, a gruesome larder set forth for the gratification of gluttony, and would become a fair garden, sacred to hygiene and the pleasure of the eye. Life would be respected both in beasts and in plants, and over the entrance to this Paradise Regained, become a colossal museum of the creatures of God, might be written, “Look, but do not touch the exhibits.”

“That is all Utopia,” cried John Pool, the humorist. “The animals, my dear Pollock, will not follow your chemical programme, but will continue to devour one another according to the mysterious laws of creation. The fly will always be the vulture of the microbe, the most harmless bird the eagle of the fly; the wolf will keep on presenting himself with legs of lamb, and the peaceful sheep will continue, as in the

was flooded with people in a barren mall. Pretty sure hard copies aren’t going anywhere.

[deleted] 6 points · 1 year ago

Yes, they are being replaced by ebooks. But guess what, ebooks still have authors. Personally, I have already made this transition, the only time I’ll even consider buying a paperback is if there is no ebook available, and even then I have to really, really want it. More often than not if there is no ebook, I just won’t buy it at all.

GailForce **Author** 2 points · 1 year ago

Ditto. I love to read this kind of answer, because it perfectly describes how I approach buying books. Thank you! <3

AlFresco **writes too much** 3 points · 1 year ago

no. Novels are bigger now than they have ever been.

Why?

Because there aren’t really any other low cost options for getting into long form storytelling.

past, to be ‘the tiger of the grass.’ Let us follow the general law, and while awaiting our turn to be devoured, let us devour.”

Arthur Blackcross, painter and critic of mystical, esoteric, and symbolic art, a most refined spirit and founder of the already celebrated School of the Æsthetes of To-Morrow, was urged to tell us in his turn what he thought painting would come to a century and more from now. I think the few lines which follow accurately sum up his little discourse:

“Is what we call modern art really an art?” he cried. Do not the artists without vocation, who practise it fairly well, with a show of talent, sufficiently prove it to be a trade, in which soul is as much lacking as sight? Can we give the name of works of art to five-sixths of the pictures and statues which litter up our annual exhibitions? Can we indeed find many painters or sculptors who are truly original creators?

“We see nothing but copies of all sorts; copies of Old Masters accommodated to modern taste, adaptations ever false of epochs forever gone by, trite copies of nature as seen with a photographer’s eye, insipid patchwork imitations of frightful war subjects such as

CarrieOakey 3 points · 1 year ago

Whether or not books exist in paper or digital form, there will be some type of narrative fiction.

MikeRaffone 3 points · 1 year ago

Despite the rise of E-books and the Kindle, plenty of people still read books ! Trust me, they’ll still be alive and kicking by then. And anyways E-books are still books. Just go for it. If paperbacks and hardcovers are dead by then you still have options

GenePoole 1 point · 1 year ago

I think its a valid concern. I went to India last year for the first time in 7 years. People asked me later if I met any interesting people and the answer was almost none, whereas the first time 2010-2011 I met loads in almost every place I traveled. One of the big differences this time, was that no one was reading books, you would be in a hostel or restaurant and people would compensate for any discomfort by just staring into their phones. I think one of the huge things that makes me worry about whether I’m wasting my time trying to write

have made Meissonier famous; nothing new, nothing that takes us out of our own humanity, nothing that transports us elsewhere. And yet it is the duty of art, whether by music or poetry or painting, at any cost to carry us beyond ourselves, that for an instant at least we may hover in that sphere of the unreal where we may take the idealistic aëropathy cure.

“I verily believe,” Blackcross went on, “that the hour is at hand when the whole universe will find itself saturated with pictures, dull landscapes, mythological figures, historic episodes, still life, and all other works soever; the very negroes will have no more of them. In that divine moment, that avenging instant, painting will die of inanition; governments will perhaps at last perceive their dense folly in not having systematically discouraged the arts as the only practical way of protecting and exalting them. In a few countries, resolved upon a general reform, the ideas of the iconoclasts will prevail; museums will be burned down, that they may no longer influence budding genius; the commonplace in all its forms will be tabooed; that is to say, the reproduction of any tangible thing, of anything that we see, of

is that people’s entertainment threshold is so high now, with the perpetual ability to just constantly swipe and click your way to some quick visual satisfaction that archaic things like nature and books just don’t really have the draw they once did.

I’ve been travelling since July and I told people I was working on a book, its pretty complex but after awhile I got pretty good at explaining it and people always seemed interested and supportive. I have it posted online, a rough draft of all the chapters, and as far as I know only one person ended up diving into it, despite people even sometimes still messaging me asking about the progress.

I think the entertainment threshold thing also has to do with how much more immersive and stimulating visual media is and not just the availability. I’m on Ibiza currently and earlier during the party season I remember just looking around and thinking about how much more powerful forces sex, drugs and music are.

Now I’m working on a movie idea to hopefully translate the idea behind my derelict book into

anything that illustrations, photography, or the theatre can sufficiently well express; and art, at last given back to itself, will be raised aloft into the upper regions of revery, seeking there its appropriate figures and symbols.

“Art will then be a closed aristocracy; its production will be rare, mystic, devout, loftily personal. It will perhaps command at most ten or twelve apostles in each generation, with something like a hundred ardent disciples to admire and encourage them.

Beyond the realm of this abstract art photography in colors, photogravure, illustrated books, will suffice for the gratification of the masses; but exhibitions being interdicted, landscape painters being ruined by photopainting, historical subjects being for the future represented by suggestive models which at the pleasure of the operator shall express pain, surprise, dejection, terror, or death, all photopainting, in short, having become simply a question of a vast diversity of mechanical processes, a branch of commerce, there will be no painters in the twenty-first century, but instead of them a few holy men, true fakirs of the ideal and the beautiful, who amidst the

a more contemporary form.

What do you all think?

DanDruff 4 points · 1 year ago

People still love to write

GenePoole 1 point · 1 year ago

but then there is the fact that with blogs people can read high quality content for free. Maybe it wasn't explicitly stated by OP but I imagine this anxiety mostly has to do with the idea of writing for a living.

LilyPond 2 points · 1 year ago

People can take books, and I mean paper, hard copy books, out of my cold, dead hands.

AnnaConda 1 point · 1 year ago

Well the physical hard-copy book might eventually become just a thing for collectors and hipsters, but written fiction isn't going anywhere soon.

Plus its worth remembering that the fiction market has already survived (and been forever changed by) the rise of multiple new

silence and incomprehension of the masses will produce masterpieces at last worthy of the name.” Slowly and with minute detail Arthur Blackcross worked out his vision of the future, not without success, for our recent visit to the Royal Academy had been hardly more cheering than those paid to our two great national bazaars of painting in Paris, at the Champ de Mars and the Champs Elysées.

For a little while we discussed the general ideas of our symbolical friend, and it was the founder of the School of the Æsthetes of To-morrow himself who changed the course of conversation by an abrupt appeal to me for my literary views and opinions.

“Come, my worthy Bibliophile, it is your turn to speak. Tell us how it will be with letters, with literature and books a hundred years hence! Since we are remodelling the society of the future to suit ourselves, this evening, each of us throwing a ray of light into the darkness of the centuries to come, I pray you illuminate certain horizons with a beam from your revolving light.”

Cries of “Yes, yes! cordial and pressing entreaties followed; and as we were all kindred spirits, and it was pleasant to hear one another

entertainment mediums, and the bits of the market that were vulnerable have already been wrecked.

BarryCade 1 point · 1 year ago

Nothing will change within your life time, that's for sure. There is no replacement for the smell of a book, the tactile sensation of the turning of it's pages ... heaven. Does anyone else crave a walk in their local library just at the thought of this? *Sigh* ... books.

GailForce Author 0 points · 1 year ago

I personally hope paper books will disappear.

I love e-books, especially when you consider how much power the authors have over e-books, and how easy it is to buy and receive e-books, and the royalties are much better, and there's no shipping cost, and the environmental impact is considerably smaller, and so on and so forth.

That being said, I don't think paper books will disappear in the foreseeable future. With some luck, we'll see their sales plummeting and e-books' sales skyrocketing in the next 15-20

think, the atmosphere of this club corner being sympathetic and agreeable, I made no demur, but improvised my discourse as follows:

“What is my view of the destiny of books, my dear friends? The question is interesting, and fires me all the more because in good faith I never put it to myself before this hour.

“If by books you are to be understood as referring to our innumerable collections of paper, printed, sewed, and bound in a cover announcing the title of the work, I own to you frankly that I do not believe (and the progress of electricity and modern mechanism forbids me to believe) that Gutenberg’s invention can do otherwise than sooner or later fall into desuetude as a means of current interpretation of our mental products.

“Printing, which Rivarol so judiciously called the artillery of thought, and of which Luther said that it is the last and best gift by which God advances the things of the Gospel – printing, which has changed the destiny of Europe, and which, especially during the last two centuries, has governed opinion through the book, the pamphlet, and the newspaper – printing, which since 1436 has reigned

years, but that’s just my hopes and dreams.

GenePoole 1 point · 1 year ago

I’ve tried to read on a kindle and it was like making love to a plastic woman. I was staying at a retreat where there was no digital entertainment for two weeks, no tv, no games, no outside contact, and I had one physical book, and a kindle loaded with ebooks, and I still had to cast it aside.

GailForce **Author** 1 points · 1 year ago

Some people are just weird like that :D

[deleted] 1 point · 1 year ago

ebooks are still books. If physical books die out... eh, so be it. I can live with that. Doesn’t seem likely though. ebooks have been around for quite a while now, and don’t show any signs of replacing physical books, and I don’t see why that would change.

[deleted] 1 point · 1 year ago · edited 1 year ago

Funny enough, e-readers, according to an article that I read in the Guardian, have taken a nosedive in sales because younger people

despotically over the mind of man, is, in my opinion, threatened with death by the various devices for registering sound which have lately been invented, and which little by little will go on to perfection.

“Notwithstanding the enormous progress which has gradually been made in the printing-press, in spite of the already existing composing-machines, easy to run, and furnishing new characters freshly moulded in movable matrices, it still appears to me that the art in which Faust and Scheffer, Estienne and Vascosa, Aldus Manutius and Nicholas Jenson successively excelled, has attained its acme of perfection, and that our grand-children will no longer trust their works to this somewhat antiquated process, now become very easy to replace by phonography, which is yet in its initial stage, and of which we have much to hope.”

There was an uproar of interruption and inquiry among my hearers; astonished “oh’s!” ironical “ah’s!” doubtful “eh! eh’s!” and mingled with a deepening murmur of denial such phrases as “But that’s impossible!” “What do you mean by that?” I had some difficulty

want print.

Edit: E-readers themselves are not declining. Ebook sales have been dropping annually.

So rejoice! The millenials know a good thing when they see it (despite much evidence to the contrary)!

EarlEbird random layman 1 point · 1 year ago

I recall studies saying it is easier to remember what you read with a physical book.

And I believe it. I’ve read entire short ebooks and 5 minutes later couldn’t tell anyone a thing about it. Any learning book I buy has to be a physical copy because of it.

GailForce Author 1 point · 1 year ago · edited 1 year ago

That’s misleading. Sales of e-readers will naturally decline once people buy them - because there’s no point buying another Kindle if my Paperwhite works perfectly. And since Amazon has a near-monopoly of e-books and e-readers, it’s natural to see that kind of fluctuation over the years.

EDIT: And please don’t forget that a lot of

in restoring silence enough to permit me to resume my remarks and explain myself more at length.

“Let me tell you that the ideas which I am about to open to you are the less affirmative that they are not ripened by reflection. I serve them up to you just as they come to me, with an appearance of paradox. However, there is nothing like a paradox for containing truth; the wildest paradoxes of the philosophers of the eighteenth century are today already partly realized.

“I take my stand, therefore, upon this incontestable fact, that the man of leisure becomes daily more reluctant to undergo fatigue, that he eagerly seeks for what he calls the comfortable, that is to say for every means of sparing himself the play and the waste of the organs. You will surely agree with me that reading, as we practise it today, soon brings on great weariness; for not only does it require of the brain a sustained attention which consumes a large proportion of the cerebral phosphates, but it also forces our bodies into various fatiguing attitudes. If we are reading one of our great newspapers it constrains us to

people are reading on their phones and tablets as well, instead of spending considerable money on a dedicated e-reader.

GillyFish 25 points · 6 months ago

According to a bunch of articles, indie bookstores are thriving - I personally love going to readings and events at bookstores and almost always end up buying something just because I'm there.

Personally I buy most of my stuff at used bookstores though - where everything's like \$1 to \$10 and I can find a lot of weird stuff. It scratches the ownership itch for me while not being crazy expensive.

WalterMelon 8 points · 6 months ago

That's an interesting trend! I love that it's happening :) totally believe that bookstores are places where communities can be built around literature.

Oh yes, used books are great. I like to visit secondhand bookstores in different cities when I have the opportunity and find some buried treasure.

acquire a certain dexterity in the art of turning and folding the sheets; if we hold the paper wide open it is not long before the muscles of tension are overtaxed, and finally, if we address ourselves to the book, the necessity of cutting the leaves and turning them one after another, ends by producing an enervated condition very distressing in the long run.

“The art of being moved by the wit, the gaiety, and the thought of others must soon demand greater facilities. I believe, then, in the success of everything which will favor and encourage the indolence and selfishness of men; the elevator has done away with the toilsome climbing of stairs; phonography will probably be the destruction of printing. Our eyes are made to see and reflect the beauties of nature, and not to wear themselves out in the reading of texts; they have been too long abused, and I like to fancy that some one will soon discover the need there is that they should be relieved by laying a greater burden upon our ears. This will be to establish an equitable compensation in our general physical economy.

“Very well, very well,” cried my attentive

GillyFish 4 points · 6 months ago

Are you in the US? Illiad in Los Angeles and Baldwin's Book Barn in Pennsylvania are my favorites. Also if you ever visit the UK there's a town called Hay-on-Wye in Wales that literally is built around used bookshops, like 25 of them. I had to buy a new suitcase on that trip.

WalterMelon 2 points · 6 months ago

Are you in the US? Illiad in Los Angeles and Baldwin's Book Barn in Pennsylvania are my favorites.

I'm in Singapore, where indie bookstores are rare, but the few around are pretty amazing. But I'd take a note of those recommendations :) Would love to travel to the US and UK some day! Sorry for the late reply, I'm just getting around to reading and replying some of these comments :)

HughJass 6 points · 6 months ago

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companions, “but the practical side of this? How do you suppose that we shall succeed in making phonographs at once portable enough, light enough, and sufficiently resisting to register long romances which, at present, contain four or five hundred pages, without getting out of order; upon what cylinders of hardened wax will you stereotype the articles and news items of journalism; finally, with the aid of what sort of piles will you generate the electric motors of your future phonograph? All this is to be explained, and it does not appear to us easy to make it practical.”

“Nevertheless it will all be done,” I replied. “There will be registering cylinders as light as celluloid penholders, capable of containing five or six hundred words and working upon very tenuous axles, and occupying not more than five square inches all the vibrations of the voice will be reproduced in them; we shall attain to perfection in this apparatus as surely as we have obtained precision in the smallest and most ornamental watches.

“As to the electricity, that will often be found in the individual himself. Each will work his pocket apparatus by a fluent current ingeniously

Me too! That’s one of my favorite parts about traveling.

DougHole 11 points · 6 months ago

I rarely buy physical books anymore. I don’t think they’ll ever be fully obsolete, but there’s no point for me in owning physical copies when I can carry an entirely library around on a laptop, tablet, or even a phone. I am used to reading ebooks or audiobooks now and find physical books more cumbersome than anything. I only buy physical books if there is some sort of special edition with unique packaging, artwork, or extras (like foldouts) that can’t be easily represented on a screen.

I find plenty of satisfaction in electronically cataloging all my books, and browsing the ebook/audiobook section of my library online is just as good as going to a library (even better since I don’t have to leave the house). I actually think electronic collecting is great for my “hoarding” tendencies. Instead of a dusty heap of books I have a folder of ebooks and a folder of audiobooks. Instead of a heap of CDs I have a music folder. Instead of random cute junk

set in action; the whole system may be kept in a simple opera-glass case, and suspended by a strap from the shoulder.

“As for the book, or let us rather say, for by that time books ‘will have lived,’ as for the novel, or the storyograph, the author will become his own publisher. To avoid imitations and counterfeits he will be obliged, first of all, to go to the Patent-Office, there to deposit his voice, and register its lowest and highest notes, giving all the counter-hearings necessary for the recognition of any imitation of his deposit. The Government will realize great profits by these patents.

“Having thus made himself right with the law, the author will talk his work, fixing it upon registering cylinders. He will himself put these patented cylinders on sale; they will be delivered in cases for the consumption of hearers.

“Men of letters will not be called Writers in the time soon to be, but rather, Narrators. Little by little the taste for style and for pompously decorated phrases will die away, but the art of utterance will take on unheard-of importance. Certain Narrators will be sought out for their

everywhere I have a Pinterest account.

WalterMelon 2 points · 6 months ago

Haha i love how you managed to find joy in substituting physical “hoarding” with the digital version I just can’t relinquish the feel and touch of a physical book, especially when I don’t feel that it brings me great satisfaction when I finish the last sentence of a good book on a Kindle.

But I would also love to carry more around with me when I travel!

HughJass 1 point · 6 months ago

i love how you managed to find joy in substituting physical “hoarding” with the digital version I just can’t relinquish the feel and touch of a physical book,

I feel the same. I have a backlog of unread Kindle books, but it’s easier to forget about them since they’re not up on a physical shelf where I can see them everyday. I actually have a small TBR shelf for physical books, so I’ve been trying to read from it lately.

fine address, their contagious sympathy, their thrilling warmth, and the perfect accuracy, the fine punctuation of their voice.

“The ladies will no longer say in speaking of a successful author, ‘What a charming writer!’ All shuddering with emotion, they will sigh, ‘Ah, how this “Teller’s” voice thrills you, charms you, moves you! What adorable low tones, what heart-rending accents of love! When you hear his voice you are fairly exhausted with emotion. There is no ravisher of the ear like him!”

My friend James Whittemore interrupted me. “And what will become of the libraries, dear friend, and of the books?”

“Libraries will be transformed into phonographotecks, or rather, phonostereoteks; they will contain the works of human genius on properly labelled cylinders, methodically arranged in little cases, rows upon rows, on shelves. The favorite editions will be the autophonographs of artists most in vogue; for example, every one will be asking for Coquelin’s ‘Molière,’ Irving’s, ‘Shakespeare,’ Salvini’s ‘Dante,’ Eleonora Duse’s ‘Dumas fils,’ Sara Bernhardt’s ‘Hugo,’ Mounet Sully’s ‘Balzac;’ while Goethe, Milton, Byron, Dickens, Emerson, Tennyson,

NigellaSeeds 9 points · 6 months ago

I love physical books, I buy on average 3-5 a week. Will be upgrading to a larger bookshelf this weekend. The main reason I like books over audio or e readers is I can take a book anywhere and enjoy it. I love a well worn book.

WalterMelon 3 points · 6 months ago

Wow 3 to 5 a week!! You’re an amazing contributor to the bookstore economy :) do you shop online or at bookstores, or both?

Quite curious though, why do you think audio and ebooks can’t be enjoyed anywhere?

JackPott 5 points · 6 months ago

3-5 a week? That’s pretty amazing. How do you sustain that financially and spacially? I definitely often read as much as that a week, but in my tiny apartment I’d run out of space pretty fast if I even bought one physical book a week. Not to mention I can’t afford that hah.

EmmaRoyds 4 points · 6 months ago

I do about that much but it’s almost entirely thrift stores/library book stores where books

Musset, and others will have been ‘vibrated upon cylinders by favorite Tellers.’

“The bibliophiles, who will have become phonographiles, will still surround themselves with rare works; they will send out their cylinders to be bound in morocco cases, adorned with fine gildings and symbolic figures, as in former days. The titles will be imprinted on the circumference of the case, and the most exquisite cases will contain cylinders specially copyrighted, editions of a single copy, in the voice of a master of the drama, of poetry, or of music, giving impromptu and unpublished variants of celebrated works.

“The Narrators, blithe authors that they will be, will relate the current events of current life, will make a study of rendering the sounds that accompany – sometimes with ironical effect, like an orchestration of Nature – the exchange of commonplace conversation, the joyful exclamations of assembled crowds, the dialects of strange people. The evocations of the Marseillais or the Auvergnats will amuse the French as the jargon of the Irishman and the Westerner will excite the laughter of Americans of the East.

are 25 cents - \$3 at most. Definitely go check out those

JackPott 3 points · 6 months ago

Ah, I should have figured that! I live in a small town in a very expensive country and that’s not an option for me here.

LeighKing 3 points · 6 months ago

Can’t you take your kindle anywhere too.?

TimBurr 4 points · 6 months ago

Bookstores are my happy place so if they stop being a thing I riot.

WalterMelon 2 points · 6 months ago

Definitely. Anywhere with books is my happy place too! What types of bookstores do you frequent? Are there more independent bookstores or chains where you are? :)

JoKing 6 points · 6 months ago

I love both, reading is reading in the end but having physical copy of the books you love... it doesnt have any price, smelling them when they are new, ahhh, just hope they don’t disappear.

“Authors who are not sensitive to vocal harmonies, or who lack the flexibility of voice necessary to a fine utterance, will avail themselves of the services of hired actors or singers to warehouse their work in the accommodating cylinder. We have to-day our secretaries and copyists; there will then be ‘phonists’ and ‘clamists’ to interpret utterances dictated by the creator of literature.

“Hearers will not regret the time when they were readers; with eyes unwearied, with countenances refreshed, their air of careless freedom will witness to the benefits of the contemplative life. Stretched upon sofas or cradled in rocking-chairs, they will enjoy in silence the marvellous adventures which the flexible tube will conduct to ears dilated with interest.

“At home, walking, sightseeing, these fortunate hearers will experience the ineffable delight of reconciling hygiene with instruction; of nourishing their minds while exercising their muscles for there will be pocket phono-operagraphs, for use during excursions among Alpine mountains or in the cafions of the Colorado.”

WalterMelon 4 points · 6 months ago

I know that feeling! It's so hard to qualify that.

JoKing 6 points · 6 months ago

I will for sure keep buying physical books
always i can

CaraVan 23 points · 6 months ago

I don't think physical books are going anywhere. And I say that as someone who has and loves her kindle. The kindle is great when I want to borrow an ebook from my library at 10:30 at night, when I'm on a plane, or when my lupus is flaring and my joints hurt too much to hold a physical book open. I often will have the physical book, audiobook, and ebook of the same title going all at once so I can jump back and forth depending on where I am. One format didn't make the others obsolete to me; I'm just consuming more formats. I also like having physical copies of books I love because they are mine forever; I never have to worry about our corporate overlords shutting off my access to books I paid for simply because they can or because of some perceived slight on my part. My ebooks will die with me, but my physical

“Your dream is most aristocratic,” interposed Julius Pollock, the humanitarian; “the future will be more democratic. I should like to see the people more favored.”

“They will be, my gentle poet,” I replied, gaily, going on to develop my vision of the future; “nothing will be lacking for them on this head; they may intoxicate themselves on literature as on pure water, and as cheaply, too, for there will then be fountains of literature in the streets as there are now hydrants.

“At every open place in the city little buildings will be erected, with hearing tubes corresponding to certain works hung all around for the benefit of the studious passer-by. They will be easily worked by the mere pressure of a button. On the other side, a sort of automatic book-dealer, set in motion by a nickel in the slot, will for this trifling sum give the works of Dickens, Dumas père, or Longfellow, on long rolls all prepared for home consumption.

“I go even farther: the author who desires personally to bring his work to the public knowledge after the fashion of the trouvères of the Middle Ages, carrying them about from house to house, may draw a modest but always

books can get passed to my kids and grandkids. Some of my most prized possessions are books from my grandpa’s library - they make him feel close to me even though he’s been dead for nearly a decade because in a way he’s still sharing his stories with me.

HazleNutt 69 points · 6 months ago

“Books are no more threatened by Kindle than stairs by elevator.”~Stephen Fry

JoyRider avengers 1 point · 6 months ago

I'm kinda torn in this sense. I have a young kid and our trash production has gone up a good amount. I'm concerned about our footprint. It would be nice to see paper alternatives that weren't made from trees likes you said. I would gladly pay more for an alternative that allowed for the same aesthetic the was more eco friendly.

SalAmanda 5 points · 6 months ago

I think physical books are a wonderful thing and believe they should never go away. However, due to a pretty severe hand injury that makes it difficult to handle a physical book for

remunerative profit by renting to all the inmates of the same apartment-house a sort of portable organ, which may be slung over the shoulder, composed of an infinite number of small tubes connected with his auditory shop, by means of which his works may be wafted through the open windows to the ears of such lodgers as may desire amusement in a moment of leisure, or cheer in an hour of solitude.

“People of small means will not be ruined, you must admit, by a tax of four or five cents for an hour’s ‘hearing,’ and the fees of the wandering author will be relatively important by the multiplicity of hearings furnished to each house in the same quarter.

“Is this all? By no means. The phonography of the future will be at the service of our grandchildren on all the occasions of life. Every restaurant-table will be provided with its phonographic collection; the public carriages, the waiting-rooms, the state - rooms of steamers, the halls and chambers of hotels will contain phonographotecks for the use of travellers. The railways will replace the parlor car by a sort of Pullman Circulating Library, which will cause travellers to forget the

long periods of time and the fact that I have downsized from a big house to a little condo, ebooks are now my preferred way to read a book. They are easy to handle and take up no space. Also, I’m a big advocate of the public library for both physical and ebooks. I read 2 - 3 books week and would go broke buying them all!

JasminRice 9 points · 6 months ago

There is just something comforting about an actual book in your hand. Also the pride of ownership since I love displaying my fave.

The way the world is heading though I think most physical books and games will be relegated to collector’s editions before we get cut off completely. It’s just cheaper to send out a digital copy of anything then it is to manufacture, store and distribute a physical one. Also with people downsizing space is an issue and we can’t all afford a separate room in the house just for books... no matter how much we want to.

weariness of the way while leaving their eyes free to admire the landscapes through which they are passing.

“I shall not undertake to enter into the technical details of the methods of operating these new interpreters of human thought, these multipliers of human speech; but rest assured that books will be forsaken by all the dwellers upon this globe, and printing will absolutely pass out of use except for the service it may still be able to render to commerce and private relations; and even there the writing-machine, by that time fully developed, will probably suffice for all needs.

“And the daily paper,’ you will ask me, ‘the great press of England and America, what will you do with that?’

“Have no fear; it will follow the general law, for public curiosity will go on forever increasing, and men will soon be dissatisfied with printed interviews more or less correctly reported. They will insist upon hearing the interviewee, upon listening to the discourse of the fashionable orator, hearing the actual song, the very voice of the diva whose first appearance was made over-night. What but the phonographic journal

Comment deleted by user · 6 months ago

MylesLong 2 points · 6 months ago

Subscription based for books??? Uhm let’s see, the library for starters, amazon has kindle unlimited if you do ebook.

JasminRice 1 point · 6 months ago

I was the same with games. I had boxes and boxes of cartilages growing up but now I depend on my steam library for games and would rather pay whatever for a retro game rather than dive into my cd collection, spend an hour installing the game then another hour on updates (happened when I tried to play the sims 3... three hours just to load a game!)

Kindle unlimited is an attempt at a subscription service but for now their selection is... not to my taste.

MattTress 1 point · 6 months ago

I think that’s the reason I love my kindle. The price of most books I buy is significantly lower than physical, and often I can find them on Libby as well. New books aren’t cheaper of course, but I rarely buy new anyway.

can give them all this? The voices of the whole world will be gathered up in the celluloid rolls which the post will bring morning by morning to the subscribing hearers. Valets and ladies'-maids will soon learn how to put them in place, the axle of the cylinder upon the two supports of the motor, and will carry them to master or mistress at the hour of awakening. Lying soft and warm upon their pillow they may hear it all, as if in a dream – foreign telegrams, financial news, humorous articles, the news of the day.

“Journalism will naturally be transformed; the highest situations will be reserved for robust young men with strong, resonant voices, trained rather in the art of enunciation than in the search for words or the turn of phrases; literary mandarinism will disappear, literators will gain only an infinitely small number of hearers, for the important point will be to be quickly informed in a few words without comment.

“In all newspaper offices there will be Speaking Halls where the editors will record in a clear voice the news received by telephonic despatch; these will be immediately registered by an ingenious apparatus arranged in the

AnetteCurtain 1 point · 6 months ago

I'm so glad I kept all my DVDs. I have a lot of stuff that's either unavailable on streaming or (mostly) costs a few bucks to rent. I would worry about the same thing in a fully digital book model, though I read more ebooks than paper already, but I buy them.W

Isn't Kindle Unlimited quite a bit like Netflix?

NoahLott 1 point · 6 months ago

Keep in mind- for movies and games the method of consuming them is exactly the same whether you stream or have the DVD, VHS, BluRay, cartridge, etc. You watch it on your TV screen. Once you have sufficient bandwidth, the experience is literally the same.

The experience of reading a paper book is very different from an e-reader, computer, tablet, or phone. The tactile experience for one, and the smell, will never be replaced. But at the moment, the ease of making notes, and for non-fiction the ease of holding and referring back and forth between two or three places at once, are very different. Ebooks are working

acoustic receiver; the cylinders thus obtained will be stereotyped in great numbers and posted in small boxes before three o'clock in the morning, except where by agreement with the telephone company the hearing of the newspaper is arranged for by private lines to subscribers' houses, as is already the case with theatrophones."

William Blackeross, the amiable critic and æsthete, who up to this point had kindly listened without interrupting my flights of fancy, now deemed it the proper moment for asking a few questions.

"Permit me to inquire," he said, "how you will make good the want of illustrations? Man is always an over-grown baby, and he will always ask for pictures and take pleasure in the representation of things which he imagines or has heard of from others."

"Your objection does not embarrass me," I replied; "illustrations will be abundant and realistic enough to satisfy the most exacting. You perhaps forget the great discovery of To-morrow, that which is soon to amaze us all; I mean the Kinetograph of Thomas Edison, of which I was so happy as to see the first trial at

on fixing the shortcomings, but even the things they have "fixed" offer similar capability but it works with a different mechanic. So it will always be different- meaning personal preference comes to play.

OpheliaPayne 4 points · 6 months ago

I love to have the physical book in my hand, and I love reading in my library (my flat's variant of a living room :P) surrounded by bookcases of beautiful books and comics and figurines. I just don't get as much from reading digitally. Don't get me wrong, I still enjoy it, it just isn't the same *shrug* However, I am at the point where I store books on my bed and take them off at night...

SheilaBlige 3 points · 6 months ago

Every now and then I encounter that one-in-a-fifty book which I know I have to master before moving on. For such a book, it's not enough to just passively read it. I want to really digest the core message of the book and remember it ideally for the rest of my life. To do this, I have to really engage with the book. That means

Orange Park, New Jersey, during a recent visit to the great electrician.

“The kinetograph will be the illustrator of daily life; not only shall we see it operating in its case, but by a system of lenses and reflectors all the figures in action which it will present in photochromo may be projected upon large white screens in our own homes. Scenes described in works of fiction and romances of adventure will be imitated by appropriately dressed figurants and immediately recorded. We shall also have, by way of supplement to the daily phonographic journal, a series of illustrations of the day, slices of active life, so to speak, fresh cut from the actual. We shall see the new pieces and the actors at the theatre, as easily as we may already hear them, in our own homes; we shall have the portrait, and, better still, the very play of countenance, of famous men, criminals, beautiful women. It will not be art, it is true, but at least it will be life, natural under all its make-up, clear, precise, and sometimes even cruel.

“It is evident,” I said, in closing this too vague sketch of the intellectual life of To-morrow, “that in all this there will be sombre features

underlining, circling, drawing stars, and writing notes in the margin. This only works when I have a physical copy. Getting intimate with the book generally allows me to learn much more from it than I would otherwise.

I don't shun ebooks. Reading contemporary fiction on iBooks is alright because I don't need to go deep into it.

WalterMelon 1 point · 6 months ago

Agreed! Curious though, if there was a digital solution for you to actively engage with your books - e.g. maybe being able to annotate your digital copies (I think there may already be such things in the market but I'm not entirely sure myself as I'm not on Team eBooks for learning either) - would you give it a try? Have you tried going digital for this sort of engagement before coming to this conclusion that it is better on physical books? :)

TommyGunn 3 points · 6 months ago

I am fortunate enough to live in a small college town that cherishes its bookstores. There's a

now unforeseen. Just as oculists have multiplied since the invention of journalism, so with the phonography yet to be, the aurists will begin to abound. They will find a way to note all the sensibilities of the ear, and to discover names of more new auricular maladies than will really exist; but no progress has ever been made without changing the place of some of our ills.

“Be all this as it may, I think that if books have a destiny, that destiny is on the eve of being accomplished; the printed book is about to disappear. After us the last of books, gentlemen!”

This after-supper prophecy had some little success even among the most sceptical of my indulgent listeners; and John Pool had the general approval when he cried, in the moment of our parting:

“Either the books must go, or they must swallow us up. I calculate that, take the whole world over, from eighty to one hundred thousand books appear every year; at an average of a thousand copies, this makes more than a hundred millions of books, the majority of which contain only the wildest extravagances

huge used bookstore that’s been in the same location for decades...just got handed off from father to son.

I think nothing can replace the joy of roaming through a physical bookstore, finding a book through serendipity, taking it home and relaxing all afternoon through turning the pages.

[deleted] 3 points · 6 months ago

I find physical books way more practical to read, it’s easier to keep track of where you are in a physical pile of paper than in an abstract UI. Also, e-readers are expensive. But I get why people like them.

Edit: I forgot that freaking DRM are mostly why I hate eBooks for now. I don’t want to buy something designed to prevent me from using what I bought how I want to.

WillPower 2 points · 6 months ago

I love a good local bookstore. The physical copies are just so great to hold and the smell is extravagant. I hope local stores never go away.

That being said, I love the fact that I can have a

or the most chimerical follies, and propagate only prejudice and error. Our social condition forces us to hear many stupid things every day. A few more or less do not amount to very great suffering in the end; but what happiness not to be obliged to read them, and to be able at last to close our eyes upon the annihilation of printed things!”

The end of book.

library to borrow from on my Kindle Paperwhite if I can't find a physical copy of a book anywhere. The convenience is the selling point for an ereader.

I get drawn in by book covers as well as books I've been craving to read. There are ones that I won't purchase on E-Readers because I would much prefer a physical version. Books like your Clancy's, Pattersons, Harlan Cobens or Grishams, I just borrow on my Kindle. If it is a book I could see myself going back to because of the scope, plot or effect, I find a physical over anything.

AdamZapel 1 point · 6 months ago

Well I am now that you said all of that!

JerryAtrick 1 point · 6 months ago

'nuff said

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